

The Water of Leith

Stat attack

The Leith's average flow rate is around 0.1 cumecs (cubic metres per second). Two recent floods in April 2006 and July 2007 recorded peak flow rates of around 70 and 65 cumecs respectively. Estimates for the 1929 flood suggest a peak flow of at least 200 cumecs. That's 2000 times the amount of water that normally passes through the Leith!

Digging deeper...

The Dunedin Botanic Garden, established in 1863, was originally situated where the University of Otago is now. Flooding in 1867 resulted in the Botanic Garden being moved to its current, less flood-prone location.

Hey guess what?

The Water of Leith runs through the heart of the University and past many student flats. Its role in student life includes the annual Leith bike race, part of capping celebrations, and the sporadic appearance of unexpected objects in the river – notably shopping trolleys.

The Water of Leith has a long history of causing problems for North Dunedin dwellers. The highest recorded flood in the Water of Leith happened in March 1929 causing extensive damage in North Dunedin.

The Water of Leith is the major waterway running through North Dunedin and is named after the main waterway that flows through Edinburgh, Scotland. It drains all the water that runs off the hills into Dunedin's Leith and North East Valleys. The path now taken by the lower parts of the river makes an interesting walk, well worth taking an hour or two to do. It takes you from the Harbour, through the University, Botanic Garden, Woodhaugh Gardens and up into Leith Valley.

Before the 1929 flood, concrete and stone walls had already been built to stabilise the river bank and aid land use. It is puzzling to many locals and visitors alike that the Leith splits in two at Forth Street, a couple of hundred metres from the harbour. An original concrete channel was completed in 1914, but the damage caused by the 1929 flood led to its duplication by the Otago Harbour Board.

In the late 1950s a high speed concrete channel was built to straighten and channel the water upstream of the Botanic Gardens. Boulder traps were built at George Street and upstream of the Lower Malvern Street bridge in the 1960s. The effectiveness of the latter is plainly evident after heavy rain.



A shopping trolley is salvaged from the Water of Leith



A torrent of flood water threatens cars on Montgomery Avenue, North Dunedin

